

Japan signs contract with U.S. on Tomahawk missile purchase

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Japan signed a contract with the United States on Thursday to buy land-based Tomahawk cruise missiles, seeking to acquire the capability of striking an adversary's territory with China and North Korea in mind.

Under the deal, arranged through Washington's foreign military sales program, Japan will pay about 254 billion yen (\$1.7 billion) in total to purchase up to 400 Tomahawks and related equipment. The payments will be over a three-year period from fiscal 2025 starting in April next year, according to the Defense Ministry.

Japan was initially planning on obtaining the latest Tomahawk Block-5 missiles in fiscal 2026 and 2027 and deploying them on its Maritime Self-Defense Force Aegis destroyers.



U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel (L) and Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara are pictured together at the Defense Ministry in Tokyo on Jan. 18, 2024. (Kyodo)

But in October it decided to start the purchase a year earlier by switching to the procurement of up to 200 of the previous version, the older Block-4 model.

U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel said his nation's forces will begin providing training for the Japan Self-Defense Forces to use Tomahawks "as early as March."

The envoy made his remark as he exchanged documents regarding the acquisition with Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara in Tokyo.

Kihara said the government's decision to bring forward the procurement of the Tomahawks, which have a strike range of about 1,600 kilometers, was made "in response to an increasingly severe security environment."

Japan pledged to acquire "counterstrike capabilities" to hit targets in enemy bases, in a major policy shift under its war-renouncing Constitution amid China's military rise and North Korea's growing nuclear and missile threats.

The ministry also said it signed another contract in October to buy the Norwegian-made Joint Strike Missile from fiscal 2026. With a range of about 500 kilometers, the JSMs are expected to be loaded on F-35A stealth fighter jets.

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